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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH ADMINISTRATION
BUREAU OF ANIMAL INDUSTRY

CARE OF WHITE MICE AND RATS 1/

White mice and rats are raised principally for use in medical laboratories in testing remedies and in determining certain types of disease; though they are also raised as pets. The information in this leaflet is based chiefly on the food and breeding habits and the housing requirements of white mice, but it will apply in a general way to white rats also.

FOOD

Many commercial firms that raise white mice and rats feed them specially prepared pellets containing a variety of ground cereals and soybeanmeal or other protein supplements. These can be obtained from a local feed dealer. A mixture of whole grains and soybean pellets may also be fed. Lettuce, chickweed, or other green feeds, and boiled carrots, potatoes, or parsnips should occasionally be furnished in small quantities, and fresh water should be supplied in every cage. All dishes should be kept clean and should be disinfected frequently by scalding.

BREEDING

The mice and rats attain sexual maturity at 2 to 3 months of age. The gestation period is about 21 days. Females produce litters of about 5 young every 30 days until they are about 18 months old. Usually, however, it is better not to breed them again until they have ceased nursing the previous litter, for they soon break down under the strain of supporting two litters at the same time. The young are weaned when 20 to 25 days old. Under this plan each breeding female would produce successive litters at intervals of 6 or 7 weeks, and in the course of a year would produce about 40 young. Each male may have in his cage 3 or 4 females if they are without young. Each female is removed to a separate cage before the young are born and is kept there until the young are weaned. The mice and rats are suitable for laboratory use when they are 6 weeks old.

1/ Formerly Wildlife Leaflet 214 issued by the Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of the Interior.

CAGES

Experiments with both wooden and metal cages have shown that, other conditions being equal, better results will be obtained in a large colony of white mice or rats by using wooden cages. The cages should be about 16 inches long, 14 inches wide, and 10 inches high, inside measurements. The front, back, and bottom should be made of galvanized-wire netting of 1/4-inch-square mesh, and the bottom should be so constructed that a dry pan can be placed underneath. Clean straw or shavings provide good bedding. Excelsior makes good nesting material.

White mice and rats thrive best in a temperature of about 65° F.

REFERENCES

More complete information on raising white mice and rats is contained in "Breeding and Care of the Albino Rat for Research Purposes," by Milton J. Greenman and F. Louise Dehring, published by the Wistar Institute of Anatomy and Biology, Philadelphia, Pa.; and in "Pets for Pleasure and Profit," by A Hyatt Verrill, published by Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, N. Y.